Report of a Confession, Different From One Given to the Detectives, Is Ridiculed by Chief Lanford

DORSEY MAKES REPLY TO MRS. L. M. FRANK

No More News of Phagan Case to Be Given to Newspapers Except Through Head of Detectives

Chief of Detectives Newport A. Lanford gave out a statement Friday morning in which he characterized as absurd the rumor that James Conley, the negro pencil factory sweeper, had ever made any confessions other than those contained in the affidavits given the detectives.

The chief stated that he had questioned Conley on this subject both Thursday evening and Friday morning and that the negro had positively denied that he had made any other confessions.

This rumor is said to have originated at the court house Thursday following certain questions which the members of the grand jury are said to have put to A. S. Colyar, a witness. Colyar is said to have been asked if he had at any time drafted or had in his possession an affidavit of confession from Conley.

Colyar emphatically denied that he had ever discussed such an affidavit with any one. The only information he had of Conley's confessions, said Colyar, he had obtained from the newspapers.

Chief Lanford says that he talked with Colyar over the telephone Friday morning and that he denied ever having or claiming to have such an affidavit, much less offering one for sale. "He also told me," said the chief, "that he had never talked with Conley in his life and stated that he had only seen the negro once and that was when he happened to glance in the door of my office when we were questioning Conley.

"Last night Conley was brought up to my office and I asked him if he had ever intimated to anybody that he knew anything about the murder of Mary Phagan before he confessed to us. He stated that he had not. This morning he said he had never seen nor heard of Colyar."

According to Chief Lanford, Conley reiterates that his affidavit of confession contains all that he knows of the murder. "I have told the truth and the whole truth as far as I know it," the negro is quoted as having said.

SOLICITOR ANSWERS MRS. FRANK.

The publication of the statement of Mrs. Leo M. Frank, attacking the prosecuting officials of the city and county for the methods employed in securing evidence against her husband, who is charged with the murder of Mary Phagan, has broken the long silence of Solicitor General Hugh M. Dorsey.

Despite the hundreds of questions which have been poured at him each day, Mr. Dorsey has consistently refrained from discussing the evidence in any way, and it was with greatest reluctance that he has consented to talk on any phase of the case.

Mrs. Frank has charged that Minola McKnight, the family cook, has been imprisoned illegally and tortured until a false affidavit was made.

"Why does the solicitor continue to apply the third degree to produce testimony?" asks Mrs. Frank. "How does he hope to get the jury to believe it?"

Mrs. Frank, in her statement, protests her belief in the complete innocence of her husband.

The reply of Solicitor Dorsey to the statement of the accused man's wife is as follows:

"I have read the statement printed in the Atlanta newspapers over the signature of Mrs. Leo M. Frank, and I have only to say, without in any wise taking issue with her premises, as I might, that the wife of a man accused of crime would probably be the last person to learn all of the facts establishing his guilt, and certainly would be the last person to admit his culpability, even though proved by overwhelming evidence to the satisfaction of every impartial citizen beyond the possibility of reasonable doubt.

"Since the discovery of this crime I have rigidly adhered to my consistent policy of refraining from newspaper interviews or statements with relation to the evidence upon which the state must depend to convict and punish the perpetrator of the crime, and it is my purpose to adhere steadfastly to this policy, submitting to the jury of Fulton county citizens, to be selected under the fair provision of the law, the evidence upon which, alone, conviction or acquittal must depend.

"A bill of indictment has been found by the grand jury, composed of impartial and respected citizens of this community, and as solicitor general of this circuit, charged with the duty of aiding in the enforcement of our laws by the prosecution of those indicted for violating the law. I welcome all evidence from any source that will aid an impartial jury, under the charge of the court, in determining the guilt or innocence of the accused.

"Perhaps the most unpleasant feature incident is the position of prosecuting attorney arises from the fact that punishment of the guilty inevitably brings suffering to relations who are innocent of participation in the crime, but who must share the humiliation flowing from its exposure.

"This, however, is an evil attendant upon crime, and the courts and their officers cannot allow their sympathies for innocent to retard the vigorous prosecution of those indicted for the commission of crime, for were it otherwise, sentiment, and not justice, would dominate the administration of our laws.

"HUGH M. DORSEY."

Mineola McKnight, the negress whose arrest is prominently mentioned in Mrs. Frank's statement, has returned to her work as a cook in the Selig family, and she has repudiated the affidavit said to have been signed by her at police headquarters.

The chief of detectives, Newport A. Lanford, is not at all disturbed, he says, by the charges of Mrs. Frank, and has made no answer.

TRIAL JUNE 30.

If nothing unexpected occurs the state will be ready to proceed with the trial of Leo Frank on the week of June 30—the second week in the June session of criminal division of superior court. Solicitor Dorsey made it plain Friday that he expected to call the case Monday, June 30, and the trial would be staged then if the defense was willing to proceed.

Chief Lanford Puts Lid on Phagan News

As the result of the agitation, said to have originated with Solicitor General Hugh M. Dorsey, the chief of the city detective department, has issued a new order prohibiting his men from giving out any information concerning the cases on which the department is at work.

The order, which reads as follows, was issued and read to the men Thursday morning just before the chief left headquarters to go before the grand jury:

"Special Order No. 6—No information pertaining to any cases worked by this department shall be given out by any of the men. All such information shall come through the head of the department. Any man violating this rule shall be subject to immediate suspension.

NEWPORT ALONZO LANFORD,

"Chief of Detectives."

While the chief's order was issued Thursday and cannot be said to be the result of any grand jury recommendation, the official stated that he was taken to task by the grand jury because so much information about the Phagan case had found its way to the newspapers.

The grand jury is said to have probed alleged "leakages" from the department to the newspapers.

CHIEF'S EXPLANATION.

Chief Lanford states that the issuance of the order should not be taken to mean that he does not have confidence in his men. "I

received a letter early Thursday morning from Solicitor General Dorsey using me to take steps to prevent the ‘leakage' of information," declared the chief, "and it was to satisfy the solicitor that I issued the order."

The chief stated that while it was true that a large part of the evidence gathered by the detectives in the Phagan case had found its way into the newspapers, this does not mean that the detective gave it out.

"When there is an especially interesting investigation in progress," said the chief, "a small army of keen-witted reporters invade police headquarters. These reporters are both shrewd and resourceful. They see who is interrogated and it is almost a matter of impossibility for any person who has been closeted with the detectives to get away from the station house without from two to a half dozen reporters ‘arming' him and plying him with questions.

"Under those circumstances it is not surprising that the newspapers frequently obtain information within a few minutes after it gets into the hands of the detectives. Oftentimes, in order to prevent inaccuracies which might prove serious, we find it advisable to set the reporters right.

AN INSTANCE OF ENTERPRISE.

"Just as an illustration of the enterprise of the newspaper reporters, I wish to call attention to an incident which occurred late Tuesday afternoon. Detectives Starnes and Campbell had hardly finished obtaining the affidavit from Minola McKnight, the negro cook at the Frank home, when a reporter called me from The Atlanta Journal office and outlined to me the contents of the affidavit. I did not at the time know myself what was in the affidavit. At my earnest request the reporter refrained from publishing this information in this late editions, it being understood that if, after I read the affidavit I found that there had been a ‘leak' I would give it out for publication. This I did on Wednesday.

"Now, this reporter did not obtain his information from any one connected with the police or detective departments. Of that I am sure. However, I do not know just where the ‘leak' was, but that there was one is an established fact.

Chief Lanford states that in the future he will have regular hours for receiving reporters.

SOLICITOR'S STATEMENT.

Solicitor Hugh M. Dorsey declared Friday that "leaks" in evidence in the prosecution of the Phagan case had not emanated from his office nor from the police detectives—Messieurs Campbell and Starnes—who are working hand in glove with the prosecuting attorney. He was certain, he asserted, that nothing bearing on the case had been given publicity by them.

"This office," said the solicitor, "has been ‘mum' on every matter considered of importance in this case. My own men always have had explicit instructions to give out nothing, and I am sure that Detectives Starnes and Campbell have told nothing."

The solicitor declined to discuss for publication the McKnight incident and asserted that his formal statement given to the newspapers Thursday afternoon would be his only reply to the accusations made against him by Mrs. Leo M. Frank.